

Elections in Russia

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This paper sets out the background to the Russian parliamentary elections due on 17 December 1995 and the presidential elections due in June 1996. It also provides an update on the situation in Chechnya, following on from Research Papers 95/4 and 94/41 - *Russia and the Chechens* and *Russia's Chechen War Continues*.

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Introduction

Elections to the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian Federal Assembly, are due to take place on 17 December. Some regions, including war-torn Chechnya, will hold regional elections on the same day. Since the constitution gives a great deal of executive power to the president, and the government does not directly depend on a majority party or coalition in the Duma, the outcome of the election is not likely to lead immediately to big policy changes. However, the results will provide some evidence of the trend of public opinion and the extent to which there is still electoral support for a democratic system and market economy in Russia. In particular the elections will reveal the extent to which the communist party and allied groups have revived and will give a preliminary indication of whether or not the communists could recapture the presidency in June 1996.

A victory for the new and partially reformed communist party in the presidential election is not impossible. The main alternatives would be the continuation in power of the ailing President Yeltsin or his replacement either by a moderate technocrat such as the present prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, or a more radical nationalist such as Aleksandr Lebed. In terms of short run policy choices the differences may be relatively small, but the recent attempts at budgetary discipline and the attack on inflation could be at risk. For the longer term, the 1996 presidential election could be of great significance in determining the future nature of the Russian state.

I Parliamentary elections

A. The system

Under the 1993 constitution the new Russian Federation parliament elected in December of that year consists of two chambers which together constitute the Federal Assembly. The lower chamber - the "State Duma" - has 450 seats and the upper chamber - the "Federation Council" - has 178, made up of two for each of the 89 components of the federation ("republics" or provinces). In 1993 no elections were held for the State Duma in Tatarstan (5 seats) or Chechnya (1 seat). Consequently the Duma has been operating with 444 members.

Elections to the State Duma are due on 17 December. The outgoing Duma was elected in December 1993 for a two year term. The Duma elected in December 1995 and future Dumas will have a life of four years, but since an elected president has the right to dissolve the Duma it is quite possible that early elections could follow after presidential elections,

particularly if the new president did not like the composition of the Duma and felt that he could use his new position to influence a different result.

By contrast with 1993 there will not be direct elections to the Federation Council (upper house), despite the fact that its term is also about to expire. There has been a long running argument about the future composition of the upper chamber, but the matter was finally resolved on 6 December when President Yeltsin signed the law in the version agreed by the Duma. The latter had overcome the veto of the Federation Council by an overwhelming vote on 5 December. As a result the next Federation Council will consist of 2 representatives of each of the component parts of the Federation, ie the heads of the locally elected legislature and administration. All the components of the Federation are obliged to hold elections for the local heads of administration, if they have not already done so, by December 1996.

The election laws which will apply to the Duma elections were adopted by the Duma and Federation Council in June 1995. They have been challenged in the courts, but the Constitutional Court has so far declined to examine alleged contraventions of the constitution. However, it is not impossible that the election law might be declared unconstitutional after the elections have taken place, as happened in Kazakhstan.¹

The electoral system will be much the same in 1995 as in 1993, with:

- half of the deputies (225) being elected by proportional representation from party lists
- the other half by single-round first-past-the-post from constituencies

There will again be a 5% threshold for the PR seats. The main innovation is that in order to register for PR seats parties must obtain 200,000 signatures from a spread of at least 17 provinces. The 5% threshold is of crucial significance, because if only a few parties manage to pass it, they will receive a disproportionately large share in the PR half of the Duma. Moreover, few of the parties and blocs which failed to cross 5% in the 1993 election have survived as effective political forces. One proposal still being pressed in the Duma in the final stage of the campaign was that the 5% threshold should be waived if those parties surmounting it jointly receive less than half of the total votes cast.² In order for the elections to be valid the overall turnout has to exceed 25%. To date opinion polls indicate that it may be around 50%, ie not high by international standards, but sufficient to overcome this hurdle.

¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2479 A/3

² *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2479 A/3

Opinion polls suggest that the number of parties receiving more than 5% of the popular vote on 17 December could be as many as 10 or as few as 3-4. In the latter event a high proportion of votes for other parties would be "wasted" and a party with only 10-15% of the vote could win 50% or more of the PR seats. The opinion poll results have to be treated with some scepticism, however, since samples are often very small and unrepresentative, different polling organisations produce widely divergent predictions and all are agreed that many voters will make up their minds at the last minute.

B. Political parties

The elections are being contested by 43 electoral associations or blocs. The associations are mainly single parties and movements, but some have been formed solely for the election. The blocs represent electoral alliances of more than one party or movement.

Political parties emerged in embryo form in the USSR and Russian Federation Supreme Soviets towards the end of Gorbachev's presidency and then more distinctly with the failed coup and the dissolution of the monolithic communist party in 1991, but a stable party system has yet to develop. The 1993 Duma elections seemed at first to have produced a more settled pattern, but many deputies were only loosely linked to parties and there have subsequently been numerous splits and realignments. The number of factions registered in the Duma rose from eight to eleven. "Left" and "right" no longer apply in the old sense because the parties, such as the communists and agrarians, which are leftist in the sense of defending public ownership, collective rights and certain aspects of the Soviet system are now often allied with the nationalist and authoritarian "right", whereas moderates and reformers who are their arch opponents belong to the "right" in the sense of upholding economic liberalism. In the outgoing Duma there were two votes of confidence in the government and 194 deputies voted against on both occasions. However, this did not mean that the Duma supported the government's reform programme - analyses of voting suggested that only 188 deputies were generally supportive of reform and 256 more or less hostile.³ The Duma reflected deep divisions within the Russian administrative establishment, but there was no clear distinction between "government" and "opposition". There is no "Boris Yeltsin" party as such.

Early in 1995 there was an officially sponsored attempt to set up two new coalitions which were intended to focus political forces ahead of the elections and, in the more ambitious version of the idea, to lay the basis for a future strong two-party system, by analogy with the United States. The plan was that the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, should head a centre-right formation (ie moderate reformist), while the Duma speaker Ivan Rybkin would head a similar centre-left formation (ie reform + social protection). It was hoped that the two

³ "Duma perekhodnogo perioda svoyu istoricheskuyu rol vpolnila" [The transitional duma has fulfilled its historic role], *Izvestiya*, 22 July 1995

coalitions would gather in the smaller parties. The Chernomyrdin party would be more supportive of the president and the Rybkin party more representative of his opponents, but he would be able to work with either.

The attempt failed: Chernomyrdin's party, *Our Home is Russia* has attracted some well-known individuals, mainly already serving in the administration, and has succeeded to some extent in establishing a distinctive identity, but it has not supplanted other parties. The Rybkin coalition was very slow in getting off the ground, mainly because the forces of the left, principally the communists and agrarians, did not trust Rybkin and wanted to retain their individual identity. It was belatedly established as a new political movement in the autumn - the *Ivan Rybkin Bloc* - but with little impact on the political scene. Thus the attempt to reduce the number of parties contesting the elections actually increased their number.

Another change since 1993 is that despite the proliferation of party labels, almost all parties and politicians are now concentrating on what is perceived as the political centre. As an *Izvestiya* commentator recently remarked: "All the more or less influential forces now come together on their two main slogans: stability and order".⁴ Even Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democrats have toned down their election rhetoric by comparison with previous campaigns. As one commentator has summarised the situation:

There is... a striking degree of consensus within Russian politics about the importance of protecting national interests and strategic primacy within the post-Soviet "near abroad" and the need for a slow transition to a market economy, albeit one dominated by major combines with close links to the state (and, hardly coincidentally, the new business-political elite).⁵

The following are the principal political parties and blocs:

Communist Party of the Russian Federation

The CPRF is the largest of several parties claiming the succession to the CPSU. It is led by Gennadi Zyuganov, most other prominent communists of the pre-1991 period having withdrawn from public life or migrated to other parties. According to opinion poll evidence it is the only major party which does not rely heavily on the personal popularity of its leader.⁶ Compared to other parties and blocs, the CPRF seems to have a relatively solid electoral base, especially among older women and others disadvantaged by recent changes. Surveys have shown more than half of its support coming from those of pensionable age.⁷ They indicate

⁴ 19 September 1995

⁵ Mark Galeotti, "Decline and Fall - Russia after Yeltsin", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 1995, 386

⁶ *Izvestiya*, 4 October 1995

⁷ *Izvestiya*, 17 November 1995

that it could receive around 20% of the popular vote (cf 12.3% in 1993), which would translate into a large number of seats if few other parties cross the 5% threshold.

What is less clear is how the communists would actually use their power if they find themselves in a position to control the Duma, or in the event of a communist winning the presidency. The CPRF claims to be the party of the rank and file activists and disclaims the inheritance of the CPSU as the party of the corrupt "nomenklatura" (the Soviet ruling class). Consequently it also disclaims responsibility for most of the Soviet past and presents itself as Social Democratic, patriotic and closely in touch with the Orthodox Church. In a broadcast on 30 November Gennadi Zyuganov said that his party was in favour of "finding the correct proportion between state, collective and shared and private forms of ownership so that an entrepreneur, a businessman and a commodity producer know the rules according to which one can work". He went on:

everything should be looked at in a very balanced and reasonable way. If privatised enterprises are operating well, yielding increased output and developing successfully, then for goodness sake they should be supported or ensured a guaranteed market and assisted. If privatised enterprises have been shut down and are not doing well, it is necessary to check what is needed in order to get the business going again and they should be helped to sort things out etc. (...)

It is written here in our pre-election platform: privatisation and nationalisation are two important levers of economic policy. They must serve the flourishing of the motherland and the strengthening of the state. When the state is being turned into nothing, when people all around are growing poorer, when people, after establishing business, are ruined six months later, when we are leaving all our markets, the Eastern European market, North Africa, the Near East...⁸

"Apple" [Yabloko] bloc

Yabloko is potentially the most successful of the democratic reformist groups, largely because of the popularity of its main leader Grigory Yavlinsky who has persistently criticised the process of economic reform from a reformist stance, seeming to offer more successful reform solutions with the emphasis on the elimination of poverty. Supporters are typically young, educated and urban.⁹ The bloc derives its name and symbol from the initials of its three founders (one, Boldyrev, now departed) which can be made to spell "apple" in Russian. Apart from Yavlinsky, its main figure is the foreign policy expert Vladimir Lukin, a former ambassador to the USA who now chairs the Duma foreign affairs committee, has put forward a liberal version of "Russia first" policies and is often mentioned as a possible alternative to the present foreign minister, Kozyrev.

⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2477 A/2

⁹ *Izvestiya*, 17 November 1995

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Like the nationalist parties and the Congress of Russian Communities (see below), Yabloko expresses concern at the fate of the 25 million ethnic Russians now outside the Russian Federation, but sees the answer in an economic union and free trade area of all the former Soviet republics, rather than in any attempt to restore the political and military union.¹⁰

Yavlinsky defines democracy as follows:

For me, democrats are people who want power to change hands once very four years, they are people who want the authorities to be monitored, people who think that each person should own property - large or small but it must all be sacrosanct - people who think that each person has the right to say what he thinks about anything at all and he cannot be jailed or killed for it. For me, democrats are those people who consider that everyone in our country should be subordinate to the law - the president, any person, any citizen.¹¹

On 29 October *Yabloko* was denied electoral registration on a technicality, causing a storm of protest from all quarters. The case went to the Supreme Court which over-ruled the election commission and had the party re-instated. This episode and the broadcast film of Yavlinsky arguing his case in the Supreme Court may have provided the party with valuable extra publicity. Opinion polls suggest that *Yabloko* could be the second largest party in the next Duma, after the communists, with around 10% of the popular vote (cf 7.8% in 1993) and that it could head the poll in St.Petersburg.

Our Home is Russia

Also known unofficially as the "party of power" because it is led by the current prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, the *Our Home is Russia* bloc includes many ministers, officials and cultural celebrities on its lists. The list of candidates is headed by Chernomyrdin, the well-known film director Nikita Mikhalkov and General Lev Rokhlin, a veteran of the Afghanistan campaign who also commanded an army group which took heavy casualties in Chechnya. As noted above, the bloc was created in the spring of 1995 and was originally intended to be one of two large coalitions set up specially for the December elections. Blessed by Yeltsin on its launch, in early October he dismissed its chances of securing more than 12% of the vote, but by mid-November he was again predicting 20% for it.¹²

The key *Our Home* slogan is "stability". Like the Chernomyrdin government, the bloc is committed to reform, but it hopes to avoid dramatic upheavals of the kind which might ensue

¹⁰ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2484 A/2

¹¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2484 A/2

¹² *Izvestiya*, 17 November 1995, front page

were irresponsible extremists to gain control of the legislature. In a radio broadcast on 9 December Viktor Chernomyrdin said:

Nothing in the immediate future should be able to turn Russia back to the time of the unsuccessful building of communism or to the endless stage of restructuring and upheavals. Our road has been determined and it is clear - order and stability...¹³

The electoral programme places great emphasis on national unity and the settlement of ethnic disputes within the federation, promising federalism in the framework of strong and efficient government. The bloc regards the essential task of economic policy as being to stimulate the creation of capital in a mixed, socially-orientated economy. In foreign policy the bloc insists that Russia is a great world power, which should not make unilateral concessions to anyone and special emphasis is placed on the need for integration with the states of the CIS.¹⁴

The bloc has an ambiguous image which could damage its electoral prospects. On one hand it is led by the man who has been prime minister for the last three years, and must take responsibility for government policy. On the other hand, Chernomyrdin has sought, with some success, to disassociate himself from the President's actions in military and security policy, especially the disastrous campaign in Chechnya. It may not be clear to the average voter whether a vote for *Our Home is Russia* is a vote for Boris Yeltsin and "the powers that be" or not.

Congress of Russian Communities

The *Congress* is a coalition of centrist and "patriotic" forces, together with the Democratic Party of Russia. Its defence of Russian communities outside the Russian Federation appeals both to Russian nationalists and to those on the ex-communist left who are nostalgic for the Soviet Union. The Congress has a particular appeal to the Russia's Cossack communities and also claims to have reached a series of understandings with the representatives of smaller ethnic groups who wish to operate within the framework of the Russian Federation.¹⁵ Surveys show most of its support coming from smaller towns in the south and east.¹⁶ The political and economic programme is broadly reformist, but somewhat contradictory.¹⁷ Unlike *Our Home is Russia*, the Congress leaders are highly critical of President Yeltsin. A leading spokesman summarised it as follows:

¹³ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2484 A/1

¹⁴ "Kakoi dom khochet postroit' Chernomyrdin" [What sort of house is Chernomyrdin building?], *Izvestiya*, 25 November 1995

¹⁵ "General Lebed' kak zerkalo russkoi evolyutsii" [General Lebed as a mirror of Russian evolution], *Izvestiya*, 8 August 1995

¹⁶ *Izvestiya*, 17 November 1995

¹⁷ See analysis in *Izvestiya*, 16 September 1995

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Our programme is based on the principle of protecting interests: protecting the interests of our people, protecting interests at our enterprises, protecting the interests of our culture.¹⁸

Best known and most popular of Congress leaders is the "charismatic" former general Aleksandr Lebed, who is campaigning for military reform (see notes on possible presidential candidates below). Another key figure and chairman of the Congress is Yury Skokov, who is closely associated with the defence industry establishment and those branches of manufacturing industry which are struggling to survive in free market conditions. The third main figure is the economist and former trade minister Sergey Glazyev, who has made a strong showing in parliament as a critic of the Chernomyrdin administration.

The CRC did not exist at the time of the last parliamentary elections, but one of its components, the Democratic Party of Russia, then received 5.5% of the vote. The Congress seems to have a good chance of surmounting 5% this time because of its appeal to several distinct interest groups, but it may not hold together after the elections.

Women of Russia

Women of Russia is the only prominent political party with women in leadership roles since the well-known Elena Pamfilova left Democratic Russia's Choice. *Women of Russia* was originally formed ahead of the 1993 election as the merger of several women's movements, including the successor to the officially-sponsored Soviet Committee of Women. Because of this it was initially regarded as close to the communists, but it adopted a centrist position in the Duma, refusing to endorse the more radical options promoted by either the reformists or the communists and nationalists. It seems to have sufficiently established its reputation for honesty and hard work in parliament to be confident of passing 5%, despite having very few male supporters (only 1 in 10 according to surveys). The *Women of Russia* party received 8.1% of the vote in 1993.

Liberal Democratic Party

The LDP is the party of extreme Russian nationalism and quasi-fascist solutions led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Its achievement of 23% of the popular vote was the major surprise of the 1993 election. Conventional opinion is that Zhirinovskiy peaked in 1993 and will fare less well in 1995, partly because there is now more competition for the populist anti-Yeltsin protest votes. Some opinion polls have the LDP barely crossing or failing at the 5% threshold this time.¹⁹ Zhirinovskiy has continued to behave outrageously in the Duma, but wins less publicity than in the past. He has been outflanked on the extreme right by a variety of

¹⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2476 A/1

¹⁹ eg *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2480 A/4

militant anti-semitic organisations which are not hampered by the need to win votes or participate in parliamentary politics.²⁰ The LDP has enjoyed some electoral success at the regional level (especially in Krasnodar and Novgorod) and probably has more activists outside Moscow than any party other than the communists. The party was most successful in the Urals, Siberia, Far East and southern fringe in 1993 and continues to draw most of its support from there, mainly from youngish men.

In many ways the LDP programme now resembles that of the communist party, reinforcing the notion of a red-brown (ie communist-fascist) alliance or convergence. For example, in an election broadcast on 4 December Zhirinovskiy told the audience that only the LDP and the communists were parties worthy of the name and that Russia's geography required "that 70% of all the economy, especially transport and communications, should be in the hands of the state". He also promised that the LDP would take a very tough line against separatism within Russia, that it would "restore order" and that it would deal with the exploitative and largely unregulated private banking sector.²¹

Agrarian Party

The Agrarian Party is based on the rural organisation of the former CPSU and therefore looks very strong on paper. In 1993 the party received 7.9% of the vote and 55 deputies. They represented a strong pro-agriculture and pro-subsidy lobby in parliament, usually in alliance with the communists. The party has struck a deal with the communists in some areas not to fight the same single-mandate seats. At the same time the Agrarians have had a foot in government in the shape of deputy prime minister Zaveryukha and agriculture minister Nazarchuk and thus found themselves simultaneously in government and opposition. The party leader is Mikhail Lapshin, formerly the director of a state farm.

The party is strongly opposed to the creation of a market in privately-owned agricultural land and wants a return to protectionism and price controls on energy, transport, rents and bread. It supports a strong state and wants to revoke the dissolution of the USSR.²²

While the Agrarian Party can probably still deliver a significant proportion of the declining rural vote, it seems to have lost ground to the communist party in the countryside and is unlikely to fare as well as in 1993. Indeed, opinion polls at the beginning of December showed it below the 5% threshold.

²⁰ Denis Paillard, "En Russie: la dynamique des patriotes", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1995, p5

²¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2479 A/1

²² "Nepodnyataya tselina predsdatel'ya Lapshina"[Chairman Lapshin's Virgin Soil], *Izvestiya*, 30 September 1995. The agriculture minister Nazarchuk, himself a leading member of the Agrarian Party, confirmed on 5 December 1995 that the party was not opposed to private ownership of small plots and gardens, but that it was "categorically" opposed to agricultural land being bought and sold - *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2480 A/1.

"Great Power" [Derzhava]

"Great Power" was founded by former vice-president (1991-3) Aleksandr Rutskoi as a "social patriotic" movement. Like "Yabloko" it was initially denied registration and later re-instated. The party seeks to create a patriotic consensus and has links with the Russian Orthodox Church. Rutskoi is a former air force officer who saw service in Afghanistan and was one of the leaders of the "parliamentary" rebellion in 1993. He was imprisoned in the aftermath, but amnestied by majority vote of the State Duma in 1994.

Russia's Democratic Choice - United Democrats

The party is the successor to *Russia's Choice* which was the most successful reformist party in the 1993 elections and initially had 58 seats in the Duma. The leader is still former prime minister Yegor Gaidar, but many of the leading figures in 1993 have left, some of them because of the party's strong stand against the Chechnya operation and others because of personality clashes. Gaidar is personally weakened by the fact that he was acting prime minister when the economic reform process began and is easy to blame now for the negative consequences. The second name on the party list is Sergey Kovalev, who won international recognition for his exposure of the human suffering in Chechnya and his blistering attacks on the competence of the armed forces, but was dismissed from his post as human rights commissioner by the Duma majority. *Russia's Democratic Choice - United Democrats* now seems likely to struggle to pass the 5% threshold (cf 15.3% in 1993).

Forward Russia!

Another democratic reformist splinter, but somewhat more populist in language. Led by former finance minister Boris Federov.

The Workers' Self-Government Party

Led by famous eye-surgeon Svyatoslav Federov. Tipped by some commentators to pass 5% on the strength of his popular reputation alone.

Ivan Rybkin's Bloc

The grand scheme hatched by President Yeltsin's advisers in the early spring of 1995 was that the Duma speaker Ivan Rybkin, who had gained some prestige from his parliamentary role and was seen as a moderating influence on the communists and agrarians, would lead a left-centre electoral bloc to balance the right-centre bloc led by Viktor Chernomyrdin. In the event few significant political factions rallied to the Rybkin bloc and it remained virtually invisible as far as the electorate was concerned until the official start of the campaign in

November. Unlike *Our Home is Russia*, the Rybkin bloc failed even to come up with a memorable name and it became known simply as the Ivan Rybkin Bloc, or, unofficially, as the Goldfish Party (a pun on Rybkin's name).

Some commentators have, nonetheless, predicted a stronger showing for the bloc in the final phase of the campaign, partly because it has strong support from regional political leaders, many of whom are standing for the "first-past-the-post" seats, partly because there is a general sense of disillusionment with the parties which have become more familiar to the electorate, and partly because Rybkin's call for a social compromise and consensual politics could sound attractive to some voters.²³

II Presidential election due in 1996

President Yeltsin's term of office is due to run until June 1996. Yeltsin was born on 1 February 1931 and will therefore be 65 at the time of the next presidential election. Until his latest illness it was assumed that he was preparing to stand for re-election, but his chances of winning in a fairly fought election were not regarded as particularly good. In the past two years his personal reputation has suffered because of the generally disappointing economic picture, because of the handling of Chechnya and as a result of erratic and sometimes undignified behaviour on his part (in particular at the ceremony marking the final departure of Russian forces from Berlin and when he failed to emerge from the presidential plane to meet the Irish prime minister). However, there were also periods of renewed political vigour on the part of the president.

President Yeltsin's new bout of illness in the late autumn of 1995 obviously makes the future very uncertain. Should he die or be permanently incapacitated, Article 92 of the Constitution adopted in 1993 will come into play. Like much of the constitution this is rather curiously worded, probably in order to avoid alluding openly to the possibility of a president dying in office. The second sub-paragraph refers to three sets of circumstances in which the president would cease to exercise his powers before the end of his term of office: resignation, persistent inability (*stoikaya nesposobnost'*) for health reasons to carry out the powers invested in him, and impeachment. In each case new elections would have to follow within three months.

The third sub-paragraph provides for the prime minister to take over temporarily *in all cases where the president of the RF is unable to carry out his duties*, a phrase which presumably

²³ S Chugaev, "Pervyi s"ezd lyubitelei BIRa (Bloka Ivana Rybkina)[The first congress of the BIR lovers]", *Izvestiya*, 10 November 1995

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includes incapability by reason of death. However, it is not explicit that "temporarily" would mean for a maximum of three months if the president had died and it is conceivable that the acting president could use this loophole to postpone fresh elections for more than three months, or even indefinitely. What is clear is that the acting president would not have all the powers available to an elected president, because sub-paragraph 92 (3) says that he may not dissolve the Duma, call a referendum or propose constitutional amendments. An acting president could, perhaps, try to abrogate the constitution by claiming that there was a state of emergency, or by questioning the validity of the constitution itself (there is some evidence that it was not really approved by the requisite numbers in the December 1993 elections), but since he would owe his position entirely to Article 92 he might hesitate to kick away the whole constitutional edifice, leaving the way open to a possible military coup or other upheavals.

If President Yeltsin were to be succeeded on a caretaker basis by the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, the latter would be under strong pressure, if not an absolute constitutional obligation, to hold fresh presidential elections within three months. Presidential elections are governed by Article 81 of the Constitution, but this only sets out broad principles: direct suffrage by secret ballot, minimum age of 35 for candidates, no more than two successive terms. The detailed procedure is to be determined by a federal law and this has so far not been adopted. An election law would therefore have to be adopted in the aftermath of the president's death. There seems to be a general assumption that it would have to be a two-stage process, similar to French presidential elections, in order to ensure that the winner had a substantial electoral backing, since there is no effective two- or three- party system to limit the number of plausible candidates.

In the event of Yeltsin's early death there would in any case be a period of intense instability in the Russian political system because there are no tried mechanisms for coping with uncertainty about the focus of executive power. Under the communists no one knew in advance exactly when an interregnum was going to happen and when it did happen there was usually no doubt about the ability of the surviving members of the politburo to get their choice of successor (from among the limited ranks of their own number) instantly endorsed by the Central Committee. Under the new democratic regime there could be a prolonged period of acute uncertainty which is likely to send the whole system into shock.

Apart from Boris Yeltsin, who may or may not stand again, the following seem the more likely candidates in the forthcoming presidential election:

Viktor Chernomyrdin

Chernomyrdin was born in 1938 in a cossack village in the Orenburg region. He has been regarded as a potential successor to Yeltsin for at least two years, largely because being prime

minister makes him very visible and gives him an air of authority, especially during President Yeltsin's prolonged absences. Were he to become acting president ahead of the elections he would have many opportunities to manipulate the campaign and benefit from the still widespread tendency to defer to existing authority. He has not enjoyed any brilliant success with the economy, but has encouraged greater financial discipline and has won support from the IMF. As prime minister, Chernomyrdin has presided over a feeble attempt in 1994 and a stronger one in 1995 to control the printing of money, subsidies and inflation.

He has also been quite successful at distancing himself from responsibility for the Chechnya campaign and its consequences and would no doubt be regarded as a steady pair of hands by most foreign governments. Chernomyrdin's greatest weakness could be his association with the now privatised gas industry, for which he was the minister when it was a state-owned monopoly, since it is widely believed that his family have large share holdings in what is one of the very few lucrative export industries. Substantiated allegations about this could seriously damage his reputation. Another major weakness is that Chernomyrdin has been prime minister for three years and can therefore be blamed by all those who feel disadvantaged by the recent traumatic developments in Russian society. Chernomyrdin's attempt to found a political party for the Duma elections - *Our Home is Russia* - has been only moderately successful so far and a poor performance in the December elections could also prove a bad start to a presidential campaign.

Chernomyrdin would certainly face several plausible challengers for the presidency, but it would be rash to predict exactly which of them would stand or fare best.

Yuri Skokov

One man who has often been regarded as the alternative prime minister in waiting and could challenge for the presidency in 1996 is Yuri Skokov, a well-connected former defence industry specialist who is now associated with the Congress of Russian Communities, an electoral alliance which seeks to appeal simultaneously to the ex-communist left and the "patriotic" right.

Aleksandr Lebed

Lebed is the former commander of Russian forces in Moldova. Whereas Skokov is the archetypal Soviet technocrat who would almost certainly have reached the Politburo under the old system, Lebed belongs to a new breed of Russian politicians who trade on populist slogans and a reputation for personal heroism. Lebed is credited with preventing an all-out conflict in Moldova, while defending the Russian-speaking population there from Moldovan/Romanian nationalism.

Gennadi Zyuganov (communist) would almost certainly stand and have the support of a relatively well-organised party machine as well as a large element in the next Duma. Whether this could translate into a majority in a second-round presidential run-off is more dubious, but the communists will have been encouraged by the success of reformed communist Alexander Kwasniewski in the Polish presidential election.

Grigory Yavlinsky (Yabloko coalition) is probably the best placed of the liberal reformers, although **Egor Gaidar** (Russia's Choice) and **Boris Federov** (Ahead Russia!) could also stand. None of these three seems to have much chance of winning in the present circumstances.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (Liberal Democrat/neo-fascist) stood against Boris Yeltsin in 1991 and will probably do so again, but if the LDP parliamentary election vote is down on 1993 he will have lost momentum. He would be competing with both Lebed and Zyuganov for the protest vote.

Other possible candidates who would start out with very limited prospects would be **Ivan Rybkin** (Duma speaker, once a plausible candidate, but weakened by the failure of his attempt at centre-left party building and by the poor public reputation of the Duma), **Vladimir Shumeiko**, **Mikhail Gorbachev**, **Nikolai Ryzhkov** (Gorbachev's prime minister), **Mikhail Lapshin** (agrarian) and **Aleksandr Rutskoi**.

The outcome of the Duma elections may well give a boost to some potential candidates and damage others. While all predictions in these matters are very risky, a reasonable prognosis might be that there will be four or five serious candidates in the first round. Should Yeltsin be a candidate, then Lebed, Zyuganov and Yavlinsky might be his strongest challengers, and each might score 10-20% of the vote. Should Yeltsin not be a candidate, then he is most likely to be replaced by Chernomyrdin as the "establishment" candidate, with the same opponents. There would be a fair probability of either Yeltsin or Chernomyrdin getting through to the final round, but the identity of the final round challenger is not possible to predict with certainty. The outcome would clearly depend on the relative ability of the contenders to expand on their first round vote.

III Chechnya and the "Power Ministries"

The origins and early phases of the violent conflict in Chechnya were described in two earlier research papers.²⁴ In brief, the Russian security forces, followed by the army, in December

²⁴ See *Russia and the Chechens* (95/4) and *Russia's Chechen War Continues* (95/41).

1994 launched a clumsy and ill-managed campaign to suppress the self-declared and internationally unrecognised independence of Chechnya, a previously autonomous republic within the Russian Federation and lying on its southern border with Georgia. The Russian onslaught united previously divided Chechen factions and there ensued a prolonged and bloody struggle, in the course of which the city of Grozny was largely destroyed. The Chechen fighters eventually withdrew from Grozny in late January 1995 and were subsequently driven back towards the Caucasus mountains. By March-April the Russian army had regained nominal control of most of the territory of Chechnya, but a guerilla war has continued, with many attacks on Russian forces, and occasionally forays into southern Russia, such as the raid on Budyennovsk in June 1995. On that occasion a Chechen band seized a hospital in the Stavropol region and took 2,500 hostages before negotiating safe passage back to Chechnya.²⁵

The total level of fatal casualties from the conflict is still unknown. The Russian Ministry of the Interior has estimated 26,000 killed, including 2,500 Russian servicemen dead or missing, but unofficial estimates are much higher. The pro-Moscow Chechen leader Salambek Khadzhiev put the total figure at 50,000. It is thought that the dead included around 20,000 civilians, including many ethnic Russians who were caught up in the fighting in Grozny.²⁶

After attempts at negotiation with Chechen representatives during the summer and autumn of 1995, the Russian government finally decided to place another "loyal" Chechen, Doku Zavgaev, at the head of a new local administration and to impose a new "treaty" confirming the special autonomous, but not independent status of Chechnya within the Russian Federation. It was also decided that elections should go ahead in Chechnya on 17 December, both for the Duma and for the local administration, despite the security situation and the determination of the underground independence movement led by Dzhokhar Dudaev to boycott and disrupt the poll. There has been particular confusion about the right of Russian soldiers serving in Chechnya to vote. While it is clear that they are entitled to vote in the national election, there have also been suggestions that their votes will be used to validate the elections for a new Chechen administration. Officially, only those permanently stationed in Chechnya are supposed to vote in the local election.²⁷

According to Russian press reports the morale of the occupying security forces is low and their grip on the mountain regions of Chechnya extremely tenuous.²⁸ After a recent tour of the region the *Izvestiya* correspondent Igor Rotar' concluded:

²⁵ Mark Galeotti, "Decline and Fall - Budennovsk and the Chechen War", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 1995, 338

²⁶ Igor Rotar', "Chechnya: davnyaya smuta" [Chechnya: the long time of troubles], *Izvestiya*, 27 November 1995

²⁷ Igor Rotar', "Shamil' prodolzhaet pugat' Moskvu" [Shamil continues to frighten Moscow], *Izvestiya*, 21 November 1995, see also *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2484 B/9

²⁸ Igor Rotar', "Po obe storony fronta" [On both sides of the front], *Izvestiya*, 24 November 1995.

The most likely outcome is that the situation in Chechnya will develop along the lines of the Algerian model: the government will control the overall situation, but will be incapable of coping with numerous small-scale terrorist groups. The distinguishing feature will be that the large quantity of arms in the hands of the civilian population and the presence of a multitude of well-trained professional saboteurs will produce a partisan war on a larger scale than in the North African Islamic state.²⁹

The whole Chechnya saga has once more called into question the extent to which the Russian state apparatus, and especially the security forces, are under democratic control. Under the 1993 constitution the President has special responsibility for the independence and integrity of the state and for its international relations (article 80); he heads the Security Council (article 83), directs foreign policy (article 86) and is commander in chief of the armed forces (article 87). The foreign, interior and defence ministers, and the heads of the security services are formally in the same position as other ministers in being answerable through the prime minister to parliament and the president, but in practice the constitutional responsibilities of the president and his position at the head of the security council (which made the original decisions to begin the Chechnya operation on 29 November and 7 December 1994³⁰) mean that all of the so-called "power ministries" operate independently of parliamentary scrutiny. Given the lengthy periods of illness and absence through ill health which have beset the president in the past year, the day-to-day running of the "power ministries" seems to be a matter for the president's large entourage of special advisers and assistants. The key figure appears to be General Aleksandr Korzhakov, who serves as President Yeltsin's personal head of security and has been described by *Izvestiya* as "the most influential figure in the Russian security structures".³¹

According to Peter Frank, "in the public's perception, this circle is responsible for much of society's misery and hardship, and is seen as having cynically feathered its own nest at the expense of the majority."³²

²⁹ Igor Rotar', "Chechnya: davnyaya smuta" [Chechnya: the long time of troubles], *Izvestiya*, 27 November 1995

³⁰ Richard Sakwa, "The Chechen crisis and Russian political development", Briefing paper 18, Royal Institute of International Affairs, March 1995

³¹ Irina Savvateeva, "Peredel sfer vliyaniya v rukovodstve silovymi strukturami zavershen" [The reallocation of spheres of influence in the leadership of the security structures is completed], *Izvestiya*, 1 August 1995.

³² Peter Frank, "Russia's choice: elections or revanche?", *The World Today*, December 1995, p229.

IV Economics and society

After several years of declining GNP³³, Russian economic output seems to have more or less stabilised in 1995 and there is talk of economic growth in 1996. However, the stabilisation of overall output has been accompanied by a further severe decline in real incomes and living standards, possibly in the region of 20-30%, mainly explained by the growth in unemployment, the displacement of civilians from areas of conflict, the failure to pay wages, particularly in the public sector, and the failure to keep pace with inflation in the cost of basic goods and energy.

Unemployment was officially calculated at 7.9% (5.8m out of an economically active population of 73m) in the third quarter of 1995, but this total included 1.8m people temporarily laid off and 1.6m on involuntary leave. Those in the latter two categories were still associated with enterprises and almost 60% of them were still receiving some payment, despite having no work to do. Only 2.1m were formally registered as unemployed. The highest levels of unemployment were recorded in provincial industrial cities such as Ivanovo, Kostroma and Yaroslavl and the lowest in the gas-producing region of Tyumen.³⁴

Inflation is running above the government's projections for 1995, but not as much as in previous years. In August-October 1995 the monthly rates were 4.6%, 4.5% and 4.7%, whereas the plan was to reduce inflation to around 30% over the whole year and to 1% per month by the end of 1995.³⁵ In 1994 inflation had surged in September-October as a result of the government increasing the money supply to pay agricultural subsidies and other deficit expenditure. The main reason for the slower rate of inflation in 1995 is that the government has resisted the pressure to increase public sector salaries in line with inflation. As a result, real incomes were only 71% of the September 1994 levels in September 1995.³⁶

It is still possible that inflation could gather pace at the turn of the year as a result of pre-election pension rises and continuing pressure from powerful lobbies such as the military and the agricultural sector for increased expenditure and subsidies. While it is possible that the general decline in economic activity has bottomed out there is little evidence yet of large-scale investment, other than in the service sector, and there is still very little consumer confidence or interest in domestically produced goods. *The Economist* sees many reasons for concern, but also a case for cautious optimism:

³³ According to official statistics, GDP was 40% lower at the end of 1994 than it had been at the end of 1991. However, it is likely that a larger portion of economic activity now goes unrecorded than in the past - *Financial Times Survey of Russia*, 10 April 1995, VI.

³⁴ *Izvestiya*, 4 November 1995, front page

³⁵ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2133 C/2

³⁶ Otto Latsis, "Dorogu kommunistam k vlasti raschishchayut sami vlasti" [The government itself clear the communists' road to government], *Izvestiya*, 19 October 1995, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SUW/0413 WA/3.

The more optimistic view is that the political centre will hold, and that in any case no Russian government will risk a return to the banana-republic conditions of 1992-94, when the rouble was crashing daily and hyperinflation beckoned. Nor could Russia easily do without the \$500m it has been receiving each month from the International Monetary Fund, a precondition for which is that it meets strict fiscal and monetary targets...

Such optimism assumes, however, a degree of prudence that even some leading centrist politicians seem to lack. It assumes, too, that no exceptional events will throw the government into a panic - another banking crisis, for example, or another flaring up of the war in Chechnya.³⁷

The most visible trends in Russian society, as a result of the economic changes of the last few years, have been the spectacular widening of the gap between the wealthy and the mass of the population, the pauperization of the liberal professions and the growth of crime, especially organised crime, fraud, corruption and gang warfare. Whereas, under the Soviet system, the state had a near-monopoly of the use of force and used it relentlessly to maintain control of political and economic processes, now both "security" and the ability to use physical force have been largely privatised. For example, there has been a mass migration of personnel from the KGB and other official security forces to the unregulated private security sector. According to one estimate, around 50% of the managers of private security companies have a KGB background, 25% came from the old Ministry of the Interior and 25% came from the army and military intelligence.³⁸

Similarly, and partly in response to this development, there has been a "professionalisation" of criminal violence. Several thousand criminal gangs are believed to exist across the Russian Federation. According to Olga Krishtanovskaya of the Russian Institute of Sociology:

Illegal power structures had to invent new ways of making money in order to win the struggle for survival and expand their influence. This led to the professionalisation of the mafia and to the creation of power structures analogous to the legitimate ones, but capable of defeating them, for which purpose the mafia needed to recruit professionals. That is why we find former sportsmen, veterans of the Afghan war and professionals from the interior ministry in their ranks, alongside members of the traditional clans of thieves, "bosses" and bandits.³⁹

V Prospects

It seems almost inevitable that the communist party will emerge as the strongest party in the Duma following the elections. If only a small number of parties pass the 5% threshold, then

³⁷ *The Economist*, 25 November 1995

³⁸ Olga Krishtanovskaya, "Mafiozni peizazh Rossii" [Russia's mafia landscape], *Izvestiya*, 21 September 1995

³⁹ *ibid*

the likely communist vote in the region of 20% will lead to an exaggerated number of seats. Several other parties which could surmount the threshold (eg the Congress of Russian Communities, the Women of Russia, the Agrarian Party, the Rybkin Bloc) have programmes which are more or less compatible with that of the communists and their deputies would often vote together. Thus the communists and their informal allies may well control more than half of the seats in the Duma at the outset.

The second largest group in the new Duma is likely to consist of members of Our Home is Russia elected both by party list and in individual constituencies. Many of the independents elected in constituencies are also likely to vote with the Chernomyrdin party on important issues. While most in this group were at one time active in the communist party, they are now distinguished by their support of Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin in government and therefore represent the political "centre". However, it is possible that a further realignment between the more radical communist/nationalists and the "centrists" could take place after the election. Until and unless this happens, the ambiguous relationship between the government and parliament is likely to persist.

The reformist tendency is likely to be weakly represented. If only Yabloko of the democratic reformist groups wins more than 5% then Yavlinsky is likely to replace Gaidar as the best known figure in this camp. However, Yabloko also has some common ground with Chernomyrdin and *Our Home is Russia* in foreign and economic policy. There is therefore some scope for future realignment here too, but even if all of the non-communist parties were to unite in a centrist-reformist coalition (ie approximately the coalition which backed the Yeltsin-Gaidar administration in 1991-2) it is unlikely that they would command a parliamentary majority in the next Duma.

Given the sweeping powers which now go with the presidency, the parliamentary elections are bound to be interpreted as a "primary" for the coming presidential election. There are still many unanswered questions about that election, including whether it will take place at all, if some quasi-constitutional excuse can be found for avoiding it. Assuming that it does go ahead, the dominant question will be whether or not President Yeltsin has sufficient will, strength and support within his own team to make a plausible bid for re-election.

A relatively strong showing for Our Home is Russia would strengthen Viktor Chernomyrdin's claim to succeed President Yeltsin. Similarly, a strong showing by the Congress of Russian Communities could be a launch pad for either or both of Aleksandr Lebed and Yuri Skokov. Gennadi Zyuganov has not hitherto been seen as a strong contender for the presidency, but an unexpectedly high vote for the communists (25-30%) could change this. Yavlinsky already looks like the most likely presidential standard bearer for the democratic reformists.

The precise domestic and external consequences of a change of president are difficult to predict. President Yeltsin has already presided over a significant switch in foreign policy since 1991, although there has been rather more rhetoric to this than substance. The more assertive line which openly tries to restore influence (but not sovereignty) over the former USSR, uses all available means to oppose NATO enlargement and seeks international allies without too much regard to their democratic credentials (Serbia, Iraq, Iran) would be likely to continue under almost any new president. However, the real economic weakness of Russia would probably continue to limit the extent to which it can afford to get back into military or diplomatic competition with the USA, Western Europe, China or Japan. There will almost certainly be a new foreign minister in place of Andrey Kozyrev, but this may make little real difference.

The greatest difference between the more plausible presidential contenders would therefore be on domestic policy and, in particular, on the pace and nature of economic reform. Chernomyrdin seems to be genuinely committed to IMF-style adaptation policies, ie tight fiscal control, balanced budgets, cuts in subsidies and state transfer payments (including state salaries), continued privatisation etc and his failures seem to have been due to his inability to prevent lapses (eg sudden bouts of money-printing), rather than to any doubt about the theory. By contrast, almost any other candidate, and especially those like Lebed and Zyuganov, would try to find means of fulfilling their election promises by loosening the grip on monetary policy and finding a new unorthodox "Russian" path to economic salvation. The immediate result could well be renewed inflation and the loss of international financial support, one reason, no doubt, for the fall in the Russian stock market on the news of Yeltsin's illness.

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